

Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church
New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail
15 Yorke Street (County Road 658)
Salem
Salem County
New Jersey

HABS No. NJ-1156

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

MOUNT PISGAH A.M.E. CHURCH

HABS No. NJ-1156

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Location: 15 Yorke Street (County Road 658), Salem, Salem County, New Jersey

Significance: The Mount Pisgah African Methodist Episcopal Church (A.M.E.) congregation is the oldest denomination of its kind in New Jersey, founded in 1754, although the structure itself is a typical, modest, late nineteenth-century vernacular Classical Revival design.

Description: Built in 1878, the Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church is a two-story, gable-front, brick building reflecting vernacular Classical Revival styling. Three bays wide and five bays deep, the rectangular block is dominated by a deep, modillioned pediment that contains a datestone; a prominent cornice with modillions runs around the building. The center entrance is composed of double paneled wood doors set in a segmental doorway. The first- and second-floor fenestration is tall and narrow, with segmental brick arches; the colored glazing is highly decorative. There is a small addition on the north side of the building that contains an elevator. The pediment date stone reads: "Built 1878 - Mt. Pisgah A.M.E. Church - For the People Had a Mind to Work."

History: The church's congregation is noteworthy as the oldest A.M.E. congregation in New Jersey, founded in 1754. Rueben Cuff, the son of a former slave named Cuff or Cuffee (the Anglicanization of the Ashanti name Kofi) was not ordained, but he began preaching to a black congregation in a log church at Elsinboro in the mid eighteenth century. That church was burned during the Revolutionary War, and it was rebuilt at Moore's Corner after the war. When Philadelphian Richard Allen assembled the leaders of sixteen black churches from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and New Jersey in 1816, Cuff was the only representative from his state. This meeting resulted in the founding of the A.M.E., with Mount Pisgah (then in Elsinboro) as the first of its denomination in New Jersey. Mount Pisgah is probably the oldest African-American church of any denomination in the state.

Among the nineteenth-century gable-front churches in South Jersey, both Broadway Methodist Church (1858) and Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church in Salem are brick; most others are frame. Broadway Methodist--very stylized, with round-arched windows, brick pilasters, a formal frame pediment--was surely a model for Mount Pisgah A.M.E., built twenty years later.

Sources: Broadway Historic District National Register nomination, ref # 92000098, (5 March 1992).

Morgan, J.H. Morgan's History of the New Jersey Conference of the A.M.E. Church. Camden: S. Chew, 1887.

Sebold, Kimberly, and Sara Amy Leach. Historic Themes and Resources within the New Jersey Coastal Heritage Trail: Southern New Jersey and the Delaware Bay. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, 1991.

Tuohy, Cyril. "Black History Lesson." Salem Sunbeam, 10 February 1991.

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